

U.S.-Mexico Border: America's Unlocked Backdoor

by

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Abstract

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U.S.-Mexico Border: America's Unlocked Backdoor

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This Strategy Research Paper (SRP) explains why the Southwest border is a national security threat. It reviews Southwest border policy end states and highlights Mexico's new policy initiatives. This SRP recommends strategic adjustments in the domestic, informational, military, and economic elements of national power required to secure the Southwest border. Finally, it concludes with the risks associated with the recommended strategic adjustments.

Why the Southwest Border is a National Security Threat

There is a growing threat to U.S. national security caused by the vulnerabilities of the Southwest border. Drug trafficking, border violence and arms trafficking continue to threaten U.S. national security. However, there is an emerging threat placing even more emphasis on border security. This threat comes from terrorist organizations. The

new threat in Latin America comes from the growing collaborations between Iran, Venezuela, Hezbollah and transnational criminal organizations. Latin American drug cartels and terrorist organizations are partnering together to exploit the weaknesses in border security.

The cartels are now in more than 1,000 U.S. cities and dominate the sale of illicit drugs by controlling the movement of most of the foreign-produced drug supply across the Southwest border.¹ \$25 billion-\$30 billion worth of illegal drugs come into the U.S. through Mexico each year.² The U.S. government states that 90% of the cocaine entering the U.S. is trafficked through Mexico.³ Significant amounts of other drugs, like Marijuana and methamphetamine, entered the U.S. through Mexico. Over the years there has been only a hand full of major drug cartels responsible for the drug trafficking. However, these major drug cartels are breaking into small units. They are breaking into smaller units to make it harder for Mexican authorities to build a case against the top cartel leaders. The smaller units also prohibit Mexican authorities from massing their manpower and resources against a single threat. This drug war is causing a significant increase of violence in Mexico, and it's spilling over the border into the U.S.

As violence in Mexico continues to escalate, the spill over into the U.S. will also continue to increase. Since 2007, violence against U.S. Border Patrol agents has increased by 35%.⁴ This violence is becoming more bold, and as a result private citizens are often caught in the cross fire. This increase in violence is not contained to the Southwest border. According to the Texas Department of Public Safety, Mexican cartels are responsible for 22 murders, 24 assaults, 15 shootings and five kidnappings

on the U.S. side of the border between January 2010 and April 2011.⁵ Other U.S. border states are reporting similar numbers.

The Mexican Government's drug war is creating a significant increase in demand by the cartels for weapons and ammunition. Making things even more vexing for both Mexican and U.S. law enforcement agents is the fact that drug cartels are gaining access to more sophisticated weaponry. The cartels are getting these weapons and ammunition through smuggling operations flowing south out of the U.S. It has now become quite common to hear U.S. officials confidently assert that 90% of the weapons used by the Mexican drug cartels come from the U.S.⁶ However, the U.S. is not the only supplier of weapons. There are indications that military-grade weaponry used by the cartels originates from countries like China, South Korea or the numerous countries in Latin America.⁷ What makes this an even more significant threat is terrorist organizations are establishing relationships with these heavily armed drug cartels who have the means to get these terrorists into the U.S. undetected through illegal border gateways.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security, in its most recent assessment, asserts it can control only 44% of the border with Mexico.⁸ This is a troubling statistic considering Customs and Border Patrol, a division of the Department of Homeland Security, grew tremendously since 2000. "In fiscal year 2000, it had 9,212 agents and an annual budget of \$1 billion. Ten years later, Customs and Border Patrol boasted 21,444 agents and a budget of \$3.5 billion."⁹ Other U.S. initiatives to identify and prevent terrorists from entering the U.S. are having minimal impacts. One such initiative is the United States Visitor and Immigrant Status Indicator Technology (US-VISIT).

US-VISIT went into service January 2004. It scans the fingerprints of foreign visitors and checks them against numerous criminal and intelligence databases to include enemy combatants captured in Iraq and Afghanistan. The problem is criminals and terrorists are aware of US-VISIT. With only 44% control of the border, they are most certainly looking for ways to avoid this system to enhance their chances of success. The Cato Institute and The Center for Immigration Studies believe the Southwest border is now the greatest threat of terrorist infiltration into the U.S.¹⁰ The Southwest border is threatened by immigrants, criminals, and terrorists because they don't need a visa to illegally cross it, and US-VISIT is only at ports of entry which are miles apart.

From 2006 to 2011, there were 1,918 apprehensions of special interest aliens at the Southwest border.¹¹ Special interest aliens are individuals from "special interest" countries designated by U.S. intelligence agencies who export individuals that could or have conducted terrorist activities against the U.S. The apprehension of Said Jaziri in January 2011 in a rural area of eastern San Diego County, California is one such example.¹² Jaziri, a documented terrorist, told border patrol agents that he had flown from Tunisia to Mexico by way of Spain, Guatemala, El Salvador and Belize.¹³ These apprehensions illustrate that the Southwest border, at least in part, is an avenue to get terrorists into the U.S. In August 2007, former Director of National Intelligence Mike McConnell stated terrorist have used the Southwest Border to enter the U.S., and they will inevitably continue to do so as long as it is an available possibility.¹⁴ Department of Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano confirmed terrorists have crossed the Southwest border with the intent to harm the American people during the July 2012

hearing before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security.¹⁵

In fact, in May 2012, the Los Angeles times reported the 2011 raid on Osama bin Laden's compound indicated there was a plan to move operatives with valid Mexican passports into Mexico. They would then illegally cross the Southwest border into the U.S. to conduct terrorist activities.¹⁶

Another concern is the increase of Iranian and Hezbollah presence in Latin America countries. "In 2006, the Homeland Security Subcommittee reported a presence of both Iran and Hezbollah in Latin America. Since then, that presence has continued to grow with Iran now having 11 embassies in Latin American countries."¹⁷ The increase of Iranian influence in Latin American caused a Subcommittee-led Congressional Delegation, in August 2012, to visit Mexico, Colombia, Paraguay, Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Argentina to assess if there was an increased threat to the U.S. caused by this development.¹⁸ The Subcommittee concluded that Iran and Hezbollah pose a threat to the entire Western Hemisphere including the U.S. and the Southwest border because they are actively researching human smuggling routes and establishing relationships with drug cartels that have knowledge of these routes.¹⁹ As tensions increase between the U.S. and Iran over its nuclear program, Iran or its agents may attempt to exploit the Southwest border for some sort of retaliation.

Hezbollah remains active in the estimated \$12 billion a year in illegal commerce in the Tri-Border Area (TBA).²⁰ The TBA is where the borders of Brazil, Paraguay and Argentina meet. The TBA is one of the most lucrative sources of revenue for Hezbollah outside of state sponsorship.²¹ In 2008, U.S. and Colombian authorities dismantled a cocaine-smuggling and money-laundering operation suspected of laundering hundreds

of millions of dollars of cocaine proceeds and paying Hezbollah 12% of the profits.²²

These funds support expensive and long term terrorist plots focused against the U.S. or U.S. allies.

U.S. Southwest Border End States

The U.S. government has no greater responsibility than to the safety and security of the American people. In order to meet this responsibility the U.S. must continue to lead global security in the 21st century. The Southwest border is where global security and homeland security collide. The Departments of Homeland Security, Justice, and State have announced five key Southwest border policy end states. These end states are a safe, secure border zone that is hospitable to and facilitates legal trade, travel and immigration; to disrupt organized criminal groups; institutionalize reforms to sustain the rule of law and respect for human rights; create a 21st century border; and to build strong and resilient communities in both countries.²³

President Obama identified specific objectives in the 2010 National Security Strategy which address border security. These objectives utilize a whole of government approach. He states, "Our approach relies on our shared efforts to identify and interdict threats; maintain effective control of our physical borders, safeguard lawful trade and travel into and out of the U.S.; and to disrupt and dismantle transnational terrorist and criminal organizations."²⁴ The U.S. government has identified very sound border policy end states. However, is the current strategy really achieving these end states?

Mexico's New President and Policy Initiatives

On December 1, 2012, Enrique Pena Nieto of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional: PRI) became the president of Mexico. The election marked a return of the PRI after losing to the National Action Party in 2000.

The population of Mexico elected the PRI because they want a return of peace, stability, and political efficacy.²⁵

Under former Mexican president Felipe Calderon, Mexico was anything but peaceful, stable, and politically efficient. Since Calderon launched a military-led “frontal assault” on drug trafficking groups in 2006, more than 50,000 people have died in violence related to organized crime.²⁶ “The murder rate has rocketed to 24 per 100,000 inhabitants, and in many of the regions bordering the U.S., the situation more closely resemble that of a limited insurgency.”²⁷ The current environment now falls on President Pena Nieto to fix. This means taking decisive steps to reduce levels of violence in Mexico, satisfying the people’s demand for peace and respect for human rights, and projecting the image of political efficacy.

In order to do this, the new government will implement three anti-organized-crime policies. The first policy will be set in a short term timeframe and involve the federal authorities proactive engagement with criminal organizations.²⁸ This approach is not a departure from Mexico’s current policy. However, President Pena Nieto will bolster this policy by increasing public investment in intelligence technology and personnel as well as strengthening Mexico’s borders and customs controls.²⁹ The second policy involves medium and long term planning to provide federal security police with a truly preventive dimension.³⁰ This means the security police will place special emphasis on tracking violent crimes such as murder, extortion, and kidnapping. The third policy will focus on social development and governance.³¹ Social development will not only defuse crime but also provide a forum for civil-society organizations to channel their combined energies to stand against criminal elements.

These policies will hopefully create profound changes in Mexico's public security over the next six years. President Pena Nieto will need domestic and international support to create and sustain a peaceful and stable Mexico. Border security is the key to making this a reality. The U.S. must work with and support Mexico's new administration to secure the Southwest border.

Policy End State or Strategy Adjustments

Current U.S. border policies are achieving some measurable successes. Apprehension of illegal aliens has decreased to 328,000 in 2011 which is the lowest level since 1970.³² One initiative developed in support of U.S. border policy is the Border Enforcement Security Task Force (BEST) program. The BEST program is a combination of U.S. federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies led by the Department of Homeland Security's Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency. It is composed of approximately 750 members from 100 law enforcement agencies. From 2005 through July 2012, the BEST program has produced 15,444 arrests, seized 937,773 pounds of illegal drugs, seized 13,546 weapons and seized \$109,824,841 in currency.³³ However, even with this and other documented successes there are many "open" issues in regards to securing the Southwest border.

The Southwest border remains only 44% secure despite Customs and Border Patrol growing from 9,212 patrol agents in 2000 to 21,444 in May 2012 with a budget increase of \$2.5 billion.³⁴ The Secure Border Initiative (SBI), first established in 2005, was intended to secure the Southwest border using improved surveillance technologies, increasing domestic law enforcement, and improving physical infrastructure on the border. The most troubling aspect of SBI is the Secure Border Initiative-Network (SBInet). SBInet is a virtual border fence using ground sensors and fixed mobile towers

equipped with cameras to detect movement across the border. However, after a decade of development and millions of dollars SBInet still is inoperative.

Another initiative which has demonstrated less than expected results is the Merida Initiative. In 2007, the Merida Initiative was a U.S., Mexico and Central America multi-year anticrime and counterdrug program. In support of the Merida Initiative, the U.S. was responsible for stopping illegal weapon distribution from the U.S. to Mexico. The U.S. also agreed to contribute \$1.5 billion in support of Mexico's and Central America's fight against the drug cartels. However, only a third of the \$1.5 billion appropriated for the Merida Initiative was delivered.³⁵ Also troubling is the Government Accountability Office's recent conclusion that the U.S. State Department lacks the outcome-based measures which makes it difficult to determine the Merida Initiative's success in both the short and long term.³⁶

The above instances are only three of the multiple costly and failed programs attempting to secure the border. These failures highlight the fact that current U.S. Southwest border policy end states are not being achieved. However, it is not a policy issue. The real problem is with the strategy the U.S. is using to achieve policy end states.

The U.S. needs to maintain current Southwest border policy end states. Changing border policy end states will cause more problems than they will solve. Changing the end states will cause Mexico to lose faith in America's commitment to border security. They will, correctly or incorrectly, assume the U.S. will change direction if things aren't going well in order to portray a positive perception. In the meantime, Mexico continues to take the brunt of the violence and terror. Another issue with

changing the end states is the American people will view it as another government failure in regards to border security. These are the reasons why the U.S. needs to maintain current Southwest border policy end states. However, in order to achieve them, it is time to make some strategic adjustments.

Strategic Adjustments Required to Achieve Policy End States

Before discussing the strategic adjustments necessary to achieve Southwest border security, it is important to understand how strategy achieves policy end states. A sound strategy is a balance between the ends, ways, and means. In this framework, the ends equate to the established policy end states mentioned above. The ways are the specific objectives required to achieve the ends. Finally, the means are the resources required to achieve the objectives. One assumes risks when the ways and means are not in balance to achieve the ends. Using the established framework above, it is time to understand what the U.S. end state is and what strategic adjustments are necessary to achieve it.

The end state the U.S. is trying to achieve in regards to the Southwest border is a safe, secure border zone that is hospitable to and facilitates legal trade, travel and immigration. The U.S., in partnership with Mexico and other Latin American countries must disrupt organized criminal groups. This partnership must also institutionalize reforms to sustain the rule of law and respect for human rights. Creating a 21st century border and building strong and resilient communities in both Mexico and the U.S. will facilitate the enduring safety and security both countries desire. In order to achieve these end states, the U.S. needs to take a whole of government approach. The strategic adjustments necessary to achieve policy end states require the use of every element of national power (diplomatic, military, economic and informational).

Diplomatic

The U.S. needs to make three diplomatic strategic adjustments to achieve its end state. The first diplomatic strategic adjustment is to establish strategic partnerships with Mexico and other Central America countries to promote peace and stability. Peace and stability on the Southwest border is a national interest for both the U.S. and Mexico. Partnering with Mexico and other Central American countries is the only way to ensure unity of effort. An example of strategic partnering is the recent memorandum of cooperation between the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration and the Government of Mexico.

Drug Enforcement Administration's Administrator Michele Leonhart recently announced the signing of a new memorandum of cooperation between the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration and the Government of Mexico to aggressively address the continuing problem of illegal methamphetamine production.³⁷ Leonhart stated that this memorandum of cooperation enhances our intelligence sharing and joint training efforts and is only possible due to the strong partnership with the government of Mexico.³⁸ Mexico's Attorney General Marisela Morales echoed Leonhart's statements stating, "This is an unprecedented event because both our countries are signing the very first international instrument that will help fight the manufacturing of synthetic drugs."³⁹ The U.S. must continue this type of strategic partnering to harness the combined resources of both countries to address border security. Only through the synergy created by this type of partnership will real change occur.

The second diplomatic strategic adjustment is to create bi-lateral and multi-national agreements with Central and South American countries to combat transnational criminal organizations with terrorist ties. These agreements would focus on eliminating

terrorist organizations in both regions. A subset of these agreements would be the elimination of money laundering, human trafficking and drug smuggling. The U.S. must eliminate these three criminal endeavors for three reasons. The first, and no surprise, is because they create instability and human suffering. The second is because terrorist organizations depend on the financial proceeds from these illegal practices to fund their organizations. Finally, terrorists can use the established corridors used to conduct human trafficking and drug smuggling to gain entrance into the U.S.

The third diplomatic strategic adjustment is to develop international support at the United Nations. The U.S. needs to discuss, in open dialog, the international terrorist threat developing in Mexico, Central and South America. Gaining support of the United Nations will accomplish four things. It will increase international pressure on Central and South American countries to address this activity. Second, it will increase the willingness of the international community to provide financial support. Third, with enough support, it is possible to advocate for a United Nations Resolution to provide a United Nations mission. This mission will provide military support to those Central and South American countries requiring resources to address this threat. Finally, leveraging the international community minimizes the potential negative connotations that the U.S. is infringing on the sovereignty of other nations.

These three diplomatic strategic adjustments will facilitate a safe, secure border zone that is hospitable to and facilitates legal trade, travel and immigration. They will disrupt organized criminal groups in Mexico, Central and South America. Finally, they will help build strong and resilient communities in both Mexico and the U.S.

Military

Millions of people and billions of dollars of legal commerce flow across the Southwest border yearly. Despite the security controls in place, sophisticated illegal enterprises are competing to exploit the porous border.⁴⁰ The four common types of threats that compete for the illegal gateways into the U.S. are traditional customs and border policing crimes, gangs, transnational criminal organizations, and transnational terrorist organizations.⁴¹ Despite the past efforts to secure the border, there remain shortfalls in the areas of manpower, checkpoint operations, and patrolling. Federal Law enforcement estimates that law enforcement apprehends only 10% to 30% of illegal aliens who cross the border.⁴² In 2010, Customs and Border Patrol turned away more than 227,000.⁴³ Using the above percentages, between 703,700 and 2.27 million illegal aliens crossed the U.S.-Mexico border in 2010 alone. This is an unacceptable situation and there are three military strategic adjustments needed to shore up the Southwest border.

The first military strategic adjustment the U.S. needs to apply on the Southwest border is the permanent use of National Guard troops and equipment. In this time of fiscal constraint, the U.S. government needs to make tougher and smarter choices. In an attempt to do this, Senator John McCain (R-Ariz) and Senator Jon Kyl (R-Ariz) proposed the Border Security Enforcement Act of 2011. The Border Security Enforcement Act combats illegal immigration, drug and alien smuggling, and violent activity on the Southwest border.⁴⁴ This legislation includes the immediate deployment of no less than 6,000 National Guard troops and an additional 5,000 Border Patrol agents by 2016.⁴⁵ However, with U.S. debt climbing and the likely significant funding

decreases for government agencies, it is unlikely there will be funding for an additional 5,000 Border Patrol agents.

These shortfalls, threats, and a porous Southwest border combine to create an opportunity for using the National Guard to augment the Border Patrol permanently. The National Guard can contribute additional capabilities and capacities in equipment and manpower to augment the Border Patrol and help fill gaps in border security. Currently, there is no long term plan to permanently leave the National Guard on the Southwest border. However, there needs to be. The National Guard is a viable option and one the U.S. needs to enact.

The second military strategic adjustment is the need to strengthen military-to-military relations with Mexico. One way to do this is to increase intelligence and information sharing with Mexico. The U.S. government reports that it is sharing more sensitive drug intelligence with Mexican officials on a regular basis. However, the Department of Defense cannot share many sources of information and intelligence. These sources of information range from space and aerial imagery, to signal intercepts, to human intelligence. This information and intelligence is critical if the U.S. and Mexican governments are to stay ahead of the cartels. Two examples of U.S.-Mexico information and intelligence sharing are Plataforma Mexico and Mexico's Sensitive Investigative Unit.

U.S. assistance was instrumental in helping to set up Plataforma Mexico, a nationwide network for intelligence analysis that substantially increases the capacity of Mexican law enforcement to collect, analyze, and disseminate drug intelligence.⁴⁶ The U.S. is also working to expand Mexico's Sensitive Investigative Unit. The U.S. Drug

Enforcement Administration (DEA) is assisting Mexico to recruit, select, and train foreign police officers.⁴⁷ These officers will work cooperatively with the DEA in major case development and the exchange of intelligence. In many respects, this intelligence sharing ability may be among the most important and most effective means to defeat transnational organized crime.

The third military strategic adjustment is to invite Mexico to join North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD). This will not be an easy task due to the complex relationship between Mexico and the U.S. NORAD is a joint U.S.–Canadian command for monitoring air and sea approaches to the U.S. Extending participation to Mexico would augment “domain awareness” in North America and increase U.S.–Mexican cooperation.⁴⁸ This relationship would help Mexico’s law enforcement agencies track ship movements off their coasts. NORAD would also provide Mexico a coordinated military structure to enhance cooperation with the U.S. and Canada on a host of common security issues.⁴⁹

These are the three military strategic shifts necessary to help secure the Southwest border. This will also help create a 21st century border. These military strategic adjustments will improve the rule of law and respect for human rights, disrupt organized criminal groups, and build strong and resilient communities in both countries.

Economic

The U.S. needs to apply two economic strategic adjustments to help secure the Southwest border. These adjustments address the Merida Initiative and U.S. fiscal responsibility and accountability. The first economic strategic adjustment is to fulfill U.S. commitments per the Merida Initiative.

The U.S. government must redouble its efforts to deliver the promised assistance, per the Merida Initiative, to Mexico. Between 2008 and 2010, Congress appropriated \$1.5 billion for Merida Initiative programs in Mexico.⁵⁰ However, the U.S. has only delivered a third of it. Alleged human rights violations are the reason for the hold up. Human rights are a key U.S. principle. However, tying Merida Initiative funding to them is not eliminating this problem. It is preventing the funding Mexico requires to not only address this issue but border security as well.

In 2011, the Obama administration revised and expanded the Merida Initiative's mission, moving from a heavy emphasis on military equipment to a more comprehensive bilateral strategy that seeks to reduce the role and influence of organized crime.⁵¹ In order to do this, Mexico's new administration needs U.S. funding support. This funding will support Mexico's ongoing judicial reform, training police officers at the state and local levels, modernizing the U.S.-Mexico border, and investing in local community and youth-oriented programs.⁵²

Over the long run, Mexico's ability to reduce the drug threat hinges on a massive overhaul of its law enforcement and judicial institutions. Reducing the drug threat creates the opportunity for peace and stability on the Southwest border. However, for decades, the Mexican police existed largely to preserve public order rather than solve crimes and bring the guilty to justice.⁵³ Secretary of Public Safety Genaro Garcia Luna observed that Mexico has had a corrupt, uneducated police force, without a budget, driving stolen vehicles, and decomposing for 40 years.⁵⁴ Improvements in the professionalization of Mexico's police will require higher salaries and more training. In

order to do this, the U.S. must provide Mexico with economic funding. This is the way to ensure human rights, higher standards, and justice endures.

U.S. fiscal responsibility and accountability is the second economic strategic adjustment. This adjustment has nothing to do with additional funding requirements, just the opposite. This adjustment calls for better accountability and oversight of the Department of Homeland Security in regards to border security. The Mandatory Operational Control Reporting and Performance Act of 2012 is an attempt to do this. It has already passed the U.S. House of Representatives and is now at the U.S. Senate for consideration. The Senate needs to pass this Act.

In 2010, the Department of Homeland Security stopped reporting the number of miles of border under operational control (i.e. secure) with the promise of a new, more holistic measure of border security called the Border Condition Index.⁵⁵ However, after nearly three years, the Department has yet to introduce this index. Without a true measurement of border security, there is no way to really understand the true threat or create a mechanism to hold the Department of Homeland Security accountable for spending abuses. The Mandatory Operational Control Reporting and Performance Act would require the Department to submit a comprehensive measurement system to the House of Representatives Homeland Security Committee within 180 days that analyzes the security at all land, air, and sea ports of entry.⁵⁶ This is the first step, and a major one, towards understanding the security level of the Southwest border. With this metric, the U.S. can vector funding to programs that are working from programs that are not. The U.S. can never afford to spend money irresponsibly, but in a time of fiscal constraint, this becomes even more critical.

These are the two economic strategic shifts necessary to help secure the Southwest border. Financially supporting Mexico, per the Merida Initiative, will help establish a safe, secure border zone that is hospitable to and facilitates legal trade, travel and immigration. It will also serve to disrupt organized criminal groups and institutionalize reforms to sustain the rule of law and respect for human rights. Finally, establishing U.S. fiscal responsibility and accountability will ensure the U.S. builds a 21st century border while eliminating wasteful and ineffective spending.

Informational

The U.S. needs to develop a new strategic communication plan highlighting the threats posed by an insecure U.S.-Mexico border and the strategic shifts necessary to secure it. Three key elements of this strategic communication plan are presidential announcements, Department of Homeland Security briefings, and United Nations engagement. This plan will heighten domestic and international awareness and create the momentum required to support the strategic shifts required to secure the border.

In order to gain domestic support, President Obama must make securing the Southwest border a top priority of his administration. The U.S. government is working to secure the Southwest border, but the only time border initiatives make national news is when something goes wrong. The national media almost never reports positive border actions or results. President Obama must get in front of the national media and communicate the importance of securing the border to national security. He must also highlight the domestic, military, and economic strategic adjustments necessary to secure the border. This will drive public support which will in turn gain congressional support.

The second key strategic communication plan element is joint Department of Homeland Security and Department of Defense briefings. Department of Homeland Security Secretary Napolitano and key military leaders must, in partnership, communicate to the national media how they are going to work together to secure the Southwest border. This communication will gain domestic support because Americans trust the military to fix difficult problems. Seeing the military involved will also build trust with Mexico and other Central American countries because they will believe the U.S. is committed to securing the border.

The third key strategic communication plan element is to take this issue to the United Nations. The U.S. must communicate the international threat posed by transnational organized crime and terrorist groups in Mexico, Central and South America. Terrorist organizations are using the money generated by drugs and human trafficking in these countries to support their operations worldwide. Communicating the international threat will gain international support. The United Nations provides the venue required to create the international coalition needed to shutdown transnational organized crime and terrorist groups in Central and South America.

Strategic Adjustment Risk Assessment

The above recommended strategic adjustments are necessary to achieve U.S. Southwest border policy end states. However, there are a few risks with this approach. The first risk is the militarization of the Southwest border. Many Americans believe border security is a domestic, civil matter. As such, Customs and Border Patrol, reporting to the Department of Homeland Security, should be the only “military” agency conducting border security. Even though National Guard Regulation 500-5/Air National Guard Instruction 10-208, signed on August 18, 2010, provides the National Guard

specific guidance and limitations under which they must operate, the general population may not know, understand or trust that this regulation will keep the military in check. This may generate public fear over the possibility of the military taking over in border towns and cities.

The second risk is the Mexican government misusing or pocketing the additional funds provided by the U.S. in support of the Merida Initiative. It is very difficult to monitor how the Mexican government spends the money. Mexico has had issues with internal government corruption. If this occurs, there could be additional mistrust and strain between the U.S. and Mexico. This strain would make unity of effort between the two nations challenging at best. This mistrust and strain could cross into other strategic adjustments involving both nations, such as information and intelligence sharing.

The third risk is the potential for transnational criminal organizations and local gangs becoming more violent in reaction to these strategic adjustments. New U.S. strategic partnerships with Mexico, Central and South American countries could force these criminal organizations to feel the need to strike harder in an attempt to hold their localized and regional power. This increase in violence could cause public support in all countries to waiver.

The last risk, and most disconcerting, is if the new strategic adjustments fail to stop terrorists from crossing the border and successfully attacking the U.S. It would have a political and economical impact of mega proportions. On the political side, it would make the attacks on the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi and the political backlash look like a minor bureaucratic ineptitude. On the economic side, it could cause the U.S. and Mexico to shutdown the Southwest border. This would prohibit trade between the

two nations worth billions of dollars a year. During this time of economic strain, the U.S. would have great difficulty absorbing this loss. In either case, it would demonstrate the U.S. government didn't do what was required to keep America and Americans safe.

Conclusion

The U.S. must make some strategic adjustments in order to secure the Southwest border. These strategic adjustments need to occur in every element of national power. The three diplomatic adjustments are to establish strategic partnerships with Mexico and other Central America countries to promote peace and stability; to create bi-lateral and multi-national agreements with South American countries to combat transnational criminal organizations with terrorist ties; and to develop international support at the United Nations. The informational adjustment is to develop a new strategic communication plan. The three military adjustments are the permanent use of National Guard troops and equipment; to strengthen military-to-military ties with Mexico; and to invite Mexico to join NORAD. Finally, the economic adjustments are to deliver the promised assistance, per the Merida Initiative, to Mexico and to institute Department of Homeland Security fiscal responsibility and accountability. The combined efforts of these strategic adjustments will create the synergy required to achieve U.S. Southwest border security.

Although there are some risks associated with these adjustments, the potential benefits outweigh the risks. The U.S., at times, has waited for some sort of emergency or disaster before taking the required steps necessary to prevent them in the first place. U.S. national security and American safety are too important to wait. These strategic adjustments will require a significant U.S. investment. But the U.S. government must ask itself, what will the cost be if we fail?

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